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AUNT MARTHA'S CORNER CUPBOARD

OR

Stories about Coffee,
Tea, Sugar, Rice, Etc.

BY

MARY AND ELIZABETH KIRBY

AMERICAN EDITION EDITED BY

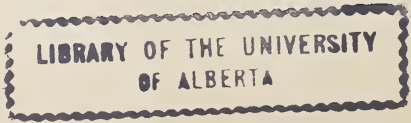
W. F. ROCHELEAU

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A rectangular stamp with a decorative, wavy border. The text inside is in a bold, sans-serif font, arranged in two lines.

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AUNT MARTHA'S CORNER CUPBOARD.

CHAPTER 1.

THE CORNER CUPBOARD.

I am afraid that Charley and Richard Knight gave their teacher a great deal of trouble.

The school they went to had just broken up for the Christmas holidays, and neither of them had stood well in his class. Indeed, they were never likely to do so, judging from the way in which they went on.

They were good-tempered boys, and favorites with their playmates. If they had a cake sent them from home, they always shared it with the rest of the scholars. And they were first and foremost at every game that was played. Their blue eyes were always twinkling with fun; and if they had been sent to Mr. Birch's Academy

merely to enjoy themselves, it would have been all very well.

But it is of no use mincing the matter: they were the most idle lads in the school. Nobody could make them learn their lessons—not even Mr. Birch, though he was very strict and now and then gave them a caning.

It was a pity they were so idle. Their papa was a learned man, and wished them to follow in his steps. It made him very unhappy when they came home without a prize; and always, by the next post, a long letter from the schoolmaster to complain that he could not make them work.

Their mamma excused them, and said it was “time enough.” But their papa was of another opinion, now that Richard had turned twelve; and he used to shake his head, and look very sad.

This cold, snowy Christmas the boys were not going home. It was a promise that they should spend the holidays with their Aunt Martha; and her old-fashioned sleigh was at the door to take them.

They had not the least objection, for they were very fond of Aunt Martha, as indeed was everybody that had ever seen her.

She lived in a house with gable ends, just as you turn into the village. It was a very old house, and was said to have been built in the days of the Puritans. It was quite covered with ivy; and there was a large garden, but the snow had hidden everything in it.

The rooms were large, but very low. The one Aunt Martha liked the best had the morning sun upon it, and looked into the garden. And here she had her work-table, and her basket of knitting, for her eyes were not very good, now she was getting old. And here she sat all the day long.

Close by was her corner cupboard, that she kept locked, and the key was on a bunch that she carried in her pocket. She never left her cupboard open, because it had so many things in it.

The boys knew the cupboard by heart. Out of it came sweet cakes and honey and sugar, and tops and marbles and all the things they liked. And there were no tiresome spelling-books or grammars or anything of the kind to plague them.

But you must not suppose that Aunt Martha

was an ignorant lady. Far from it. She knew many things indeed, and she did not like the thought that her dear nephews should grow up to be dunces, which was likely to be the case.

Of course, she did not presume to think she could teach them as well as Mr. Birch, who understood Latin and Greek, and had kept school twenty years. But she had a scheme in her head to teach them something.

Not that she intended them to learn lessons in the holidays,—that would have been extremely unkind. The knowledge she meant to give them was not to be found in their lesson-books, thumbed and dog-eared as they were; for an idle boy can wear his book out without using it. No; the lore she was thinking about was contained close by, in her corner cupboard.

It seemed to Aunt Martha—for she was a lady of a lively imagination—as if everything in that cupboard,—her china, her tea, her coffee, her sugar, even her needle,—had a story to tell, and a most entertaining one, too. Had not many of the things been in foreign parts, where there are great palm-trees, and monkeys, and black men, and lions, and tigers?

And if they had not been abroad, they were sure to have something to relate that the boys had never heard.

The boys loved to hear stories told them. There was a time, just when it got dusk, before the lamp was lighted or the tea and plum-cake brought in. Charley and Richard would have played about all day long, and pelted each other with snow balls, and made slides on the pond, and scampered up and down the lane, till their legs, young as they were, began to feel tired. And then it was nice to sit on the hearth-rug before the fire, and hear Aunt Martha tell a tale.

Now, Aunt Martha had prepared a great many tales, and had them, so to say, at her finger-ends. She did not make them up as she went along, for that would have spoiled everything. Indeed, I almost think she had learned them by heart.

She hoped that when her dear little boys had heard all the curious things she was about to relate, it would make them want to read for themselves.

Charley and Richard had no idea of the trouble their good aunt was taking on their account,

and they did just as they had always done. They rolled their hoops, and threw snow-balls, and scampered about to their hearts' content. And when, at last, their legs began to ache, good old Sally, who had lived with Aunt Martha for nearly thirty years, brought them in, took off their wet boots and put on dry ones, and brushed their hair, and washed their faces and sent them into the parlor to their aunt.

"She'll have a story to tell, I warrant," said old Sally, who was a little in the secret.

Now, everything happened just as Aunt Martha had planned.

The boys wanted a story as much as ever, but they wished for something new.

They were thoroughly acquainted with "Jack the Giant-killer," and entertaining as he had once been, they were by this time a little tired of him.

They knew "Cinderella" and "Little Red Riding Hood" by heart, and they did not want to hear them over again. Not that they could get really tired of such delightful stories, but they "might lie by," Charley said, "for one Christmas, and something else come out."

Aunt Martha was quite willing—indeed, this was just what she had been planning for. Her dear old face brightened up, and looked as pleased as could be, when Charley settled himself on the rug, and Richard brought a stool and sat close by, their merry blue eyes fixed intently upon her.

Then Aunt Martha began to relate her first story—"The Story of a Tea-Cup."



CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF THE TEA-CUP.

"Rome," as I dare-say you have heard, "was not built in a day."

People who use this expression, mean by it that nothing of any value can be done without a great deal of time and trouble.

The tea-cup seems a simple thing, and you use and handle it very often, and drink your tea out of it every afternoon. But perhaps you have never been told its whole history, and do not know that it takes a vast amount of labor, and sets a number of persons to work, before it can become a cup at all.

I will speak of the best china, that is kept on the top shelf in the cupboard, and only comes out on company days and holidays. It is very superior, let me tell you, to the blue and white cups and saucers in the kitchen, that have no gold rim round them, and did not cost nearly so much money.

The word *china* will remind you of a country a long way off, where the gentlemen have long

braids of hair, that look like tails, hanging down their backs, and the ladies hobble about in little shoes turned up at the toes.

The Chinaman drinks a great deal of tea, because he likes it, and the tea grows in his country. And cups of tea are always being handed about on little trays, that everybody may have some. So the Chinaman has a great deal of practice in making tea cups, and can do it remarkably well.

I am sorry to say he is not of an open disposition, and likes to keep everything he knows to himself.

He would not tell the people who lived in other countries how he made his cups, though they were very curious to know and asked him over and over again.

There is a town in China where a great many potters lived, and made their beautiful cups. The streets were quite crowded with the potters, and boat-loads of rice came every day for them to eat.

There was a river close by the town; and when the cups and pots were finished, they were packed and sent away in the boats. The potter's

furnaces were always burning to bake the cups, so that at night the town looked as if it were on fire.

The potters would not let a stranger stay all night in the place, for fear he would find out the secret of the cup-making. He was obliged either to sleep in one of the boats, or to go away till the next morning.

But it happened that two strangers had been on the watch for a long time, and at last thought they had found out the secret.

One day they bought some great squares, or bricks, that were being sold in the market and carried off by the potters. They felt quite sure this was the stuff the cups were going to be made of. Now the bricks were sold, of course, to be used in the potteries. They were made of a kind of flint called *petunse*, that looks bright and glittering, as if it had been sprinkled with something to make it shine. And the Chinaman collects it with great care, and grinds it to powder and makes the bricks of it.

The two strangers carried the bricks home to their own country, and set to work to make cups.

But, alas! they could do nothing of the sort. They were like a workman who had left half his tools behind him. For they wanted another substance to mix with the *petunse*, and that was called *kaolin*.

Now *kaolin* was dug by the Chinaman out of some deep mines, that he knew very well, and often went to.

It lay about in little lumps, and he picked it out, and made it into bricks just as he had done the other.

And he laughed very much when he heard what the "barbarians," as he called them, had been trying to do. For he did not pity them in the least.

"They think themselves very clever," he said, "to make a body that shall be all flesh and no bones."

He meant that the *kaolin* was hard, and could not turn to powder when it was burnt as the *petunse* did; so that it was like bones to the cup, and made it firm. Indeed, without it the cup was too soft, and did not hold together.

I should not have told you this long story if it had nothing to do with the best china. But

people can get this kind of clay in America, England, and other countries. It does quite as well as the Chinaman's bricks, and the best china is always made of it. People come a long way to look for the "porcelain clay," as it is called; and they dig it out of the earth, and carry it to a great building which is a porcelain manufactory, where all kinds of cups and saucers, and jugs and basins are constantly being made.

And as soon as the clay gets there, it is thrust into a machine, where it runs upon a number of sharp knives that work round and round, having been set there on purpose to chop it to pieces. When it has been chopped long enough, it is turned into a kind of churn, and churned as though it were going to be made into butter. Indeed, when the churning is over, the person who has churned it calls it "clay-cream."

Other things, such as flint and bone, are now mixed with it. But, in order that they might work in harmony one with the other, the flint and the bone each had to be ground to a fine powder, and then made like itself into "clay-cream."

The two creams, in two separate vessels, are carried to a room called "the mixing-room," and put into a pan of water and stirred well about.

They are stirred until they are quite smooth, and without an atom of grit.

But as cups can not be made of the clay-cream, it has to be made solid again. And it is boiled over a fire until the moisture is dried up, and it is very much like dough. A man now begins to slap and beat it, and cut it in pieces, and to fling the pieces one on the other with all his might. And when he has slapped it long enough, he says it is quite "ready for the potter."

The potter is called "a thrower,"—and it is a good name for him.

He flings a ball of the clay on a little round table before him, with such force that it sticks there quite fast.

The table is called a whirling-table, for it is made to whirl by machinery as fast as the potter wishes. As the table whirls the potter pinches and pats and works the clay with his fingers, giving it what he calls a "shape." He can do just what he likes with the clay, and can make it into any shape he pleases.

He has some tools to help him, such as little pegs and bits of wood, with which he scrapes on the outside and presses on the inside until the clay is brought to the form of a cup. When this is done he stops the table and takes the cup off, but it is not finished.

Aunt Martha had scarcely time to finish the last sentence before there was a tap at the door, and old Sally came in with the tea things.

Now, the best china had been taken down and carefully dusted; for Christmas was looked upon as a high day and a holiday, and Charley and Richard were company, as a matter of course. As their heads were still running upon cups and saucers, they jumped up and began to look at them, and to talk about "flint," and "clay," and "kilns," in a very learned manner, and one that made old Sally smile.

Aunt Martha was very much pleased, for she saw that her story had been carefully listened to and had not gone in at one ear and out at the other, as such instructive stories sometimes do.

And she was more pleased still, when her little nephews asked her a great many questions, and wanted to know more about "the tea-cup."

She did not tell them any more just then; for she was a wise old lady, and she wished to keep their curiosity awake, and not let them have too much of the subject at once.

So she talked about something else all tea-time, and then she had out puzzles and bagatelle, and a great many other games, to make the evening pass pleasantly. But old Sally told her that when the boys went to bed, and she brought away their candle, they were talking very earnestly about "the tea-cup."

And the next afternoon, when they had finished running about, and their hair had been brushed, and their faces washed, they ran into the parlor where their aunt was sitting, and asked her to go on with her story, for they wanted to know a great deal more.

Now it was rather early, and Aunt Martha had hardly finished her afternoon's nap. But she did not like to keep the boys waiting. So she roused herself up, put a log of wood on the fire,—for it was very cold,—and when Charley and Richard had settled themselves, she began, or rather went on with—"The Story of the Tea-Cup."

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE TEA-CUP WAS FINISHED.

The cup was, as I told you, taken off the wheel. It was then set aside to dry; and very soon it reached what the potter called "the green state"—though he better have said the "hard state" for it was getting gradually harder. It was next taken to the turning-lathe, where all its roughness was smoothed away, and its appearance very much improved. But the first cups were by no means so handsome as those now in use, and they had no handles.

The Chinaman makes his cup without a handle; and when tea-cups were first used in this country, they had no handles, and were very much smaller than they are now. People in those days could not afford to drink much tea at a time, it was so dear and so scarce.

But fashions are always changing, and in our days every cup must have a handle.

The handle is made separate from the cup, and fitted on afterwards. It is nothing but a strip of clay cut the proper length, and pressed into

a mould to make it the right shape. The man who does this takes pains to make it fit very neatly.

The parts where the handle is joined to the cup



THE POTTER AT HIS LATHE—MAKING A VASE.

are wet with a certain mixture of clay and water, to make them stick; and they do so at once.

The cup is now put into a square box, or case, with sand at the bottom. Other cups are placed in with it, though care is taken to prevent them from touching each other. Another box, just

like it, and full of cups is set over it, so that the bottom of one box makes a lid for the other. All the boxes, piled up in this way, are put into an oven, called "the potter's kiln." This oven is in the shape of a cone, and has a hole at the top to let the smoke out.

The Chinaman is at the trouble of putting each cup into a separate box in order, as he says, that its delicate complexion may not be spoiled by the fire.

When the cup is taken from the box, it is pure white and nearly transparent. It is not yet thought worthy of the name of porcelain, and is merely called "biscuit china."

People were a long time before they found out how to paint pictures on the cup, or to give it its beautiful gloss.

The surface was not hard enough to hold the colors, and needed a coating upon it that is called "enamel."

At first no one except Chinamen knew how to make enamel. But an English potter named Bernard Palissy tried again and again to make it. Indeed, he spent all his time in trying first one thing and then another.

He made cup after cup, and coated them over with what he thought was the right thing; but not one of them would do. And at last he became so poor that he had no wood left to heat his furnace—just at the time, too, when more cups were ready to go into it.

He wanted wood to such a degree that he became quite frantic, and felt that he must put something into his furnace, he did not care what. He ran into the room where his wife was sitting, and snatched up the chairs and tables as if he had been crazy, and ran with them to his furnace.

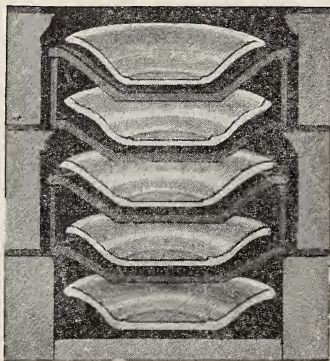
It is a comfort to know that he succeeded at last, and earned a great deal of money. But many improvements have been made in tea-cups since his time.

Before the pictures are painted on the cup, it is nicely cleaned, to remove any atom of dust; and then it has to be glossed, or, as it is called, "glazed." The stuff that gives it its gloss, and makes it shine, looks like thick cream, and is kept in wooden troughs in a room called "the dipping-room."

A man dips the cup into the trough, and turns

it about in such a way that every part shall be coated, and yet every drop drained out.

It is now put on a board, and, with other cups, again baked, but in a cooler oven than before. When it comes out of the oven it shines with the beautiful gloss you see.



SECTIONAL VIEW OF CHINA-KILN—
SAUCERS PACKED FOR BAKING.

But it is not finished; for it is a bare cup, without any pictures of flowers or fruit, or figures like those on the best china.

It is taken to a room where there are long tables, and a great many windows to let in the light.

In China one man paints nothing but red, another paints nothing but blue; and so on. But here, in the painting-room, there is a little difference. One man paints flowers, another leaves, another fruit, and another figures.

The colors they use are obliged to be made of metals—such as gold, iron, and tin—for nothing else can stand the heat of the furnace, in which the cups have once more to be baked. Indeed, the painter now and then puts his cup or his saucer into the kiln before it is quite finished to see how the colors will stand.

When the cup has been painted, and baked for the last time, it is taken to another room still, where there are a great many women and girls busy at work.

Each girl sits with her face to the light, and takes a cup in one hand, and a stone called an agate in the other. She rubs the parts of the cup that are intended to look like gold with the stone until they become of a brilliant gloss, and shine as if they were gold.

There is a place in Staffordshire, England, called "the Potteries," where cups and pots have been made for centuries.

In olden time they were very rough-looking things, and had neither gilding nor gloss. But the people who used them were just as rough, and so was the country round.

The roads were very bad indeed, and full of deep ruts, so that no carriage could go over



CHINAMAN BAKING HIS CUPS.

them. There were no towns or factories, and the potter lived in a little thatched cottage like a hovel.

He had a shed where he worked at his wheel and baked his pots. He dug the clay out

himself, and his boys helped him to "throw" and "press," and do all that needed to be done.

When he had finished making his pots, his wife used to bring up the mules from the common, where they were grazing, and get them ready for a journey. She put panniers on their backs, filled with her husband's pots; and then she set off, over the bad, rutty roads, to the towns and villages to sell them.

That part of Staffordshire is still called "the Potteries;" but it is very much improved—and has great towns, and factories, and good roads, and is not at all what it used to be.

One of the towns is called Burslem; and a potter named Mr. Wedgwood lived there. He spent all his life in making the cups of a more beautiful kind than had ever been made before. They were of a cream color; and instead of the ugly figures that were in fashion then, he painted them with flowers and fruit, as we see them now.

One reason why he got on so well was because he took so much pains, and would not let anything pass unless it was perfect. If a cup came off the wheel with the slightest imperfection,

he would break it to pieces with his stick, and say, "This will not do for me."

Charley and Richard were so interested in what Aunt Martha had been telling them, that Sally tapped at the door twice before they heard her. And then, when she had brought in the tea, and the muffins hot out of the oven, they could neither eat nor drink for talking about "the tea-cups." And Richard began to wonder what Aunt Martha's next story would be about, and tried to make her tell him. But she did not think this would be wise; and all he could ascertain was that the subject of it would come out of her corner cupboard.

It was clear, however, that this story had done them good; for the next morning, Charley and Richard, instead of spending every moment in play, walked up and down the garden-walk, talking about the clay, and the glaze, and the enamel—things they had known nothing about before.

But their greatest pleasure was to come; for strolling out by the gate into the lane, they spied, all at once, some bits of broken pottery. You would have thought they had found some-

thing very precious indeed, they were so pleased.

They picked them up, and carried them off in triumph into the old tool-house, where Charley at once set to work with a great stone to pound them to powder. He had nearly broken them up, to mix with some clay that Richard brought out of the ditch when the thought struck him that these blue and white pieces of pottery were not like Aunt Martha's best china. He would go in and ask her if they were.

Aunt Martha was seated at her work-table, in the parlor, when the boys, with dirty hands, came running in. She sent them out again to wash their hands, and then told them that Charley was right. Her best cups and saucers had the patterns painted on them, and required much greater skill to make than these.

Common blue and white cups—such as Charley had a bit of in his hand—were managed in quite another way. A paper, with the pattern printed on it, was wrapped around each cup. The cup was rubbed for a long time; and then set in water. The paper soon peeled off, but the blue marks were left behind.

Richard and Charley wanted to know a great

deal more, but Aunt Martha would not answer any of their questions. So they went back to the tool-house again, to play at potters. What delightful work it was! so delightful, that Charley made up his mind to be a potter as soon as he was old enough,—and if his papa would let him.

Richard said, if he were a potter he should go to China; and then he remembered his dog-eared geography in his desk at school and thought when he went back he would look into it, and see if it said anything about china. He should like to know a little more than Aunt Martha had told them.

That afternoon Sally had to keep the boys from going into the parlor too soon; for their faces were washed and their hair brushed half an hour before the usual time.

But good Aunt Martha was ready; and when she heard their feet pattering along the hall, she got up and opened the door. Then Charley settled himself on the hearth-rug, and Richard brought a stool; and the boys were as still as mice while Aunt Martha told them—"The Story of the Tea."

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF THE TEA.

A tea cup is not of much use, if it is kept only to look at. It needs to be filled with good strong tea.

Tea grows in China, where the beautiful cups are made on purpose to hold it. And it was sipped by emperors on their thrones, and by their grand mandarins, many years before we knew anything about it. And even now, the best of the tea is kept at home for the benefit of the Court, and it is only the next best that finds its way into our tea-pots.

About two-hundred and fifty years ago, there was no tea in England except what people made of the herbs that grew in their gardens, such as mint, and thyme, and sage. No one, not even their majesties, the kings and queens, had ever tasted a cup of real Chinese tea.

But it happened that in the year 1610—for I dare-say you would like to know the date—some Dutch ships brought a little tea to Holland; and then a little more was brought to England, and

people talked about it as "a new drink that came from China."

Everybody would have liked to taste some of it, but it was very difficult to get; and when a present of two pounds of tea was made to the king, he thought it a very handsome gift indeed.

Not many people could buy tea in those days; and even when they did get it, they hardly knew whether it was to be eaten or drunk.

By slow degrees, however, tea found its way to every home in England, and finally to America, and in these days everyone can afford to buy it. It is welcomed in the palace of the Queen, and it affords refreshment to the poorest cottager. A cup of tea is equally grateful to all.

It must be confessed that tea makes its appearance under great disadvantages. No one who has seen it growing in the Flowery Land of its birth, can suppose it to be the same thing. And it is rather whimsical as to where it grows. The north is too cold, and the south is too hot; but there is a middle tract of country neither too hot nor too cold, that suits it the best.

The tea plant is a tree, and it varies in size according to the country and climate in which it

grows. The wild tree, in the hot climate of Southern India, sometimes grows as high as thirty feet. But in the cooler and drier climate of China it is much smaller.



TEA PLANT IN FLOWER.

The Chinaman lets his trees grow for three years, then he cuts off the ends of the branches so the tree will become bushy and produce a large quantity of leaves, for these are the

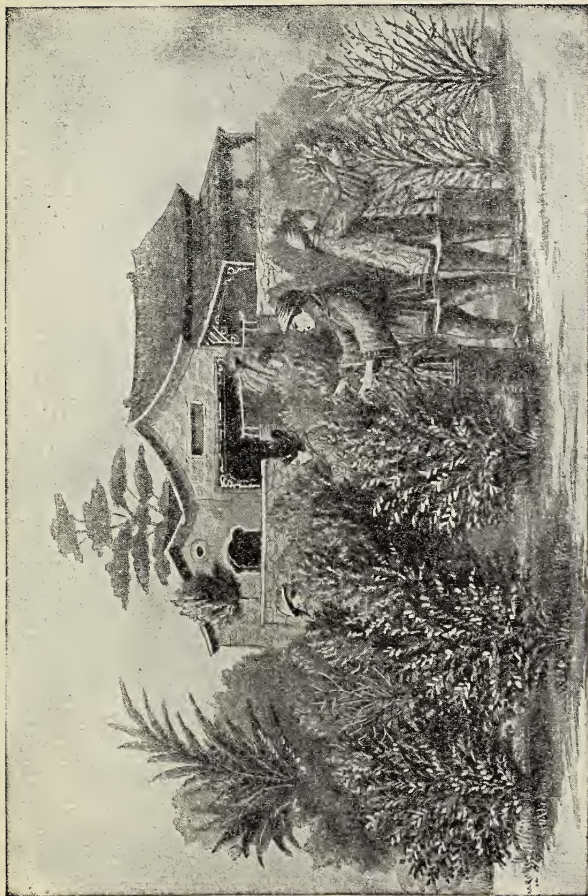
valuable part of the plant. The trees in the tea-gardens of China are about four feet high, and are trimmed so as to have a round, bushy top.

This plant is called by the Chinaman *Teha* or *Tha*, and from this word comes our English name of tea.

It has white flowers, a little like the wild rose; and when the flowers wither some green pods, that contain the seed, appear. The seed is something like a chestnut and is about half as large. There are from one to five seeds in a pod.

The Chinaman is very careful how he sows his seeds, because he must grow a number of new trees each year if he wishes to keep his crop good. Hence he sows six or seven seeds in one hole, to be quite sure that some of them will come up.

The leaves are, as already stated, the most important part of the plant. They are very handsome and glossy, like the leaves of the camelia that lives in the hothouse. But it is not on account of their beauty that they are so much valued; they have some good qualities that no other leaves possess.



PICKING TEA LEAVES.

When a person drinks a cup of tea, how refreshed he feels! That is because of the reviving and strengthening quality in the leaf. The leaf also has in it a bitter substance which might be called the pure extract of tea; and this has a great effect in taking away the feeling of being wearied.

The Chinaman has his tea-plantation, just as we have our vegetable-garden, or the Irishman has his potato-ground. It is called "a tea-farm;" and the farmer lives close by, in a funny little house, like a pagoda, with long pointed eaves to it.

He and his wife are always busy in the plantation, for she helps him to weed and water, and her feet have no little shoes to pinch them. She could not afford to hobble about as the fine ladies do, or to be carried in a sedan chair.

In the early spring, when the young leaves are newly put forth, and have a delicious flavor, the family begins to be very busy. The children come into the plantation and strip them off, until the branches are nearly bare. But they leave enough for another gathering by-and-by.

Of course the young tender leaves are the best,

and make the nicest tea. The Chinaman calls it *Souchong*. When the leaves that are left get older, they are gathered, but they are not so delicate, and people do not like them so well.

There is still a third gathering, but this is



THE TEA BEING DRIED.

worse than the last, and makes very poor tea.

When the leaves are stripped off, they are thrown into some shallow baskets, and set in the sun, where the wind can blow on them to dry them. They are then put in a pan, and

placed on a stove with a fire under it, to be dried still more. While they are over the fire they are stirred about with a brush until they are quite dry.

You may see that the tea-leaf is rolled up and crumpled, and that it comes straight when it is put into the water. The Chinaman takes the trouble to roll it in this way. He does it at a board, and rolls the leaf between his fingers. After this has been done, he again dries the leaves over the fire.

He takes a good deal of pains to pick out all the bad leaves and throw them away. He knows his tea will be looked over, before it can be sold to a person who knows good tea from bad.

This person is a tea-merchant, and lives at the next town. All day long, the farmers keep coming into the office where he sits, with chests of tea slung over their shoulders. They want him to buy, and he is quite willing. Indeed, the more he can get, the better, for he wants to send it in a ship to Europe, or the United States.

But he always makes the farmer open his chest and spread his tea out before him. He looks at it very sharply, and takes it in his hand and

smells it; and he sees at once if any bad leaves are in it. But if it is really good tea, he gives the farmer some money, and sends him away, leaving his tea-chest behind him.

The farmer goes to the market and lays out some of his money, though he is very saving and thrifty, or he would not be a Chinaman.

It was a good thing that old Sally just then came in with the tea, for that was what Charley and Richard wanted. Not that they were either hungry or thirsty; but it was delightful to jump up and look at the tea in the caddy, as Aunt Martha took it out with a scoop.

It was better still to watch the water being poured on it, and to see the tea leaves begin to unroll themselves and to become quite flat. Charley clapped his hands with glee, and they both skipped round the room, saying they had never enjoyed a cup of tea so much as now they knew something about it.

The next afternoon Charley and Richard found their way to a room they had never cared much about before. This room was the library, and had rows and rows of shelves, with many books upon them.

But besides the books upon the shelves, there were others on the table. And Charley, who was thinking very much about foreign countries, was glad to find a book lying open on Aunt Martha's desk, telling all about India and China. It was full of pictures; among them were some of potters making cups and other vessels, and of people picking off the leaves of the tea-plant.

How quickly the time passed in looking at them! Instead of being tired of doing nothing, as Charley very often was when it rained and he could not play out of doors, the time seemed to fly; and Aunt Martha had finished her nap and taken her knitting, and was ready to tell her story, almost before they were ready to hear it.

Not that they were a moment too late; oh no!—they wanted very much to know more about the contents of Aunt Martha's corner cupboard, and were very glad when, without any delay, she began—"The Story of the Sugar."

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF THE SUGAR.

Everybody likes sugar. The Christmas pudding would be nothing without it; and the plum-cake, and the tarts, and the custards, and all the nice things that boys and girls are so fond of, would have no sweet taste if it were not for the sugar.

But its range is much wider than this. It is found in the ripe peach on the tree, and in the juicy pear, in the grape, and the orange, and fruits too many for me to name. The bee knows the taste of it right well, and finds it hidden deep in the bell of the flower.

And it finds its way into the stems of plants, and makes their juices sweet and delicious. There is a tall reed-like plant, with a yellow stem, called the sugar-cane because there is so much sugar in it.

In some places people are always chewing it. They cut it with their knives to make the juice come out, and go on cutting and chewing all day long.

The sugar-cane grows in very hot countries, where black people live. The burning sun pours its rays full upon it; but this is what it likes,



SUGAR CANE.

and what makes its juice so sweet. There are several of the West India Islands, among them:

Cuba, Jamaica, and Haiti, in which sugar-cane grows, and we get a great deal of our sugar from these islands, but some of it is made in our country. At one time the black people who made the sugar and took care of the canes were slaves, and were bought and sold in the market; but they have now all been set free.



HOEING THE CANE.

A great giant called *Steam* helps to make the sugar now, and does more than all the black people put together. People did not all at once find out how helpful this giant was, and that he could turn mills and push carriages and do all sorts of work. But they were very glad when

they did know it, and when he began to help them make the sugar, for weights and rollers and heavy wheels are nothing to him.

A sugar-plantation is a very pretty sight. The tall yellow canes rustle in the wind; and at the top is a tuft of flowers, that looks like a silvery plume. And here and there black people are busy at work, hoeing and weeding. The women have blue and scarlet handkerchiefs tied round their heads, for they dearly love a bit of finery.

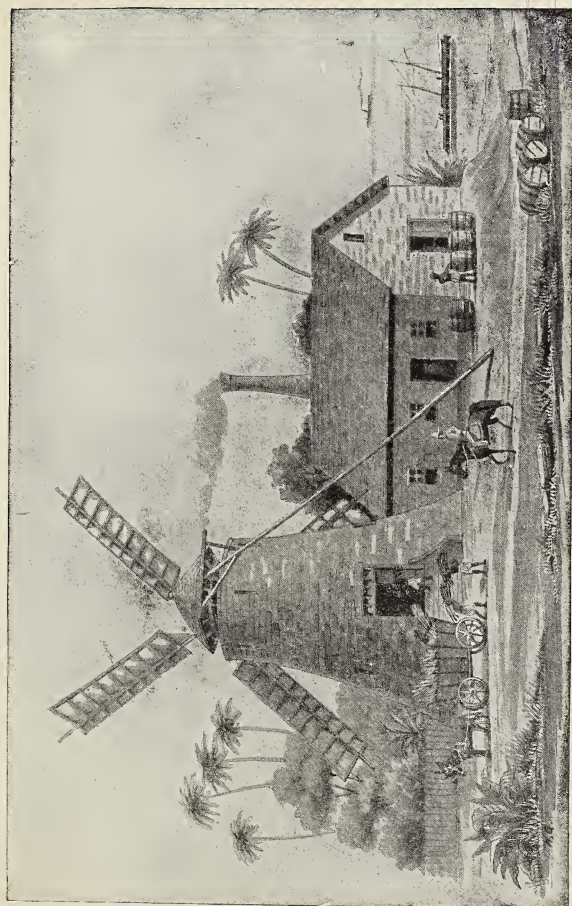
Sometimes, in the middle of the night, when all is still and cool, and the moon is shining, a troop of monkeys come racing down from some mountains near. Then woe betide the sugar-canes!

The monkeys love the taste of sugar; and they clutch at the canes with their long fingers, and pull them up, and bite them, and do a great deal of mischief.

Happily the black man has a fancy for roasted monkey,—a dish we never see; and he thinks it no trouble to sit watching hour after hour, with his gun in his hand, waiting for the monkeys.

Down they come on the full run, and do not

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A SUGAR MILL IN THE WEST INDIES.

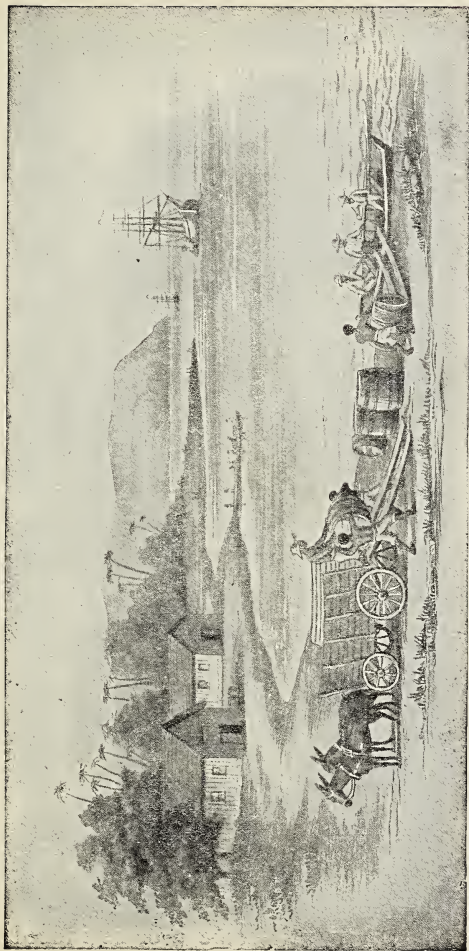
all see him at once. But pop goes the gun, and one or more is sure to be shot.

The stem of the sugar-cane is not hollow like the grass or the reed, but solid, and filled with the sweet juice we have been talking about, and that makes the sugar.

But the juice, before anything is done to it, is very wholesome, and people who suck it are sure to be strong and healthy. Even the horses that work in the sugar-mill get as fat as can be, for they are always chewing the canes. Nothing fattens poultry half so well,—and there are always plenty of fowls pecking about in the negro's little garden.

But the juice, is too good to be wasted. It forms the material of that vast supply of sugar met with in every town, and village, and household. This juice has to go through a great many stages, and pass through a great many hands, like the tea-cup, before it is made into the white sugar that we use in our coffee.

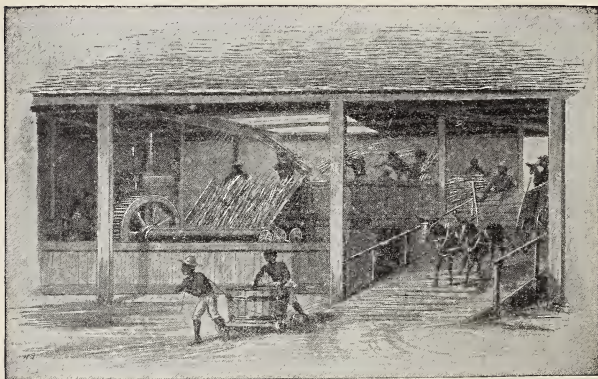
In the first place, the beautiful yellow canes are cut down close to the ground, and tied up in bundles. Then they are carried to a mill, and the big giant Steam sends them between great



SENDING THE SUGAR TO EUROPE FROM THE WEST INDIES.

iron rollers and squeezes out every drop of juice.

The juice runs into a large tank called a "vat," and is made hot, lest it should turn sour; and a little lime is put in with it, to make it clear, and then the liquid is boiled very fast indeed.



IN THE SUGAR MILL.

After it has been boiled and is set to cool, a great many sparkling crystals will form in it, which are the real sugar. But the crystals are mixed up with a thick liquid that is called molasses, and which has to be taken away. This used to be a very tiresome process indeed, in

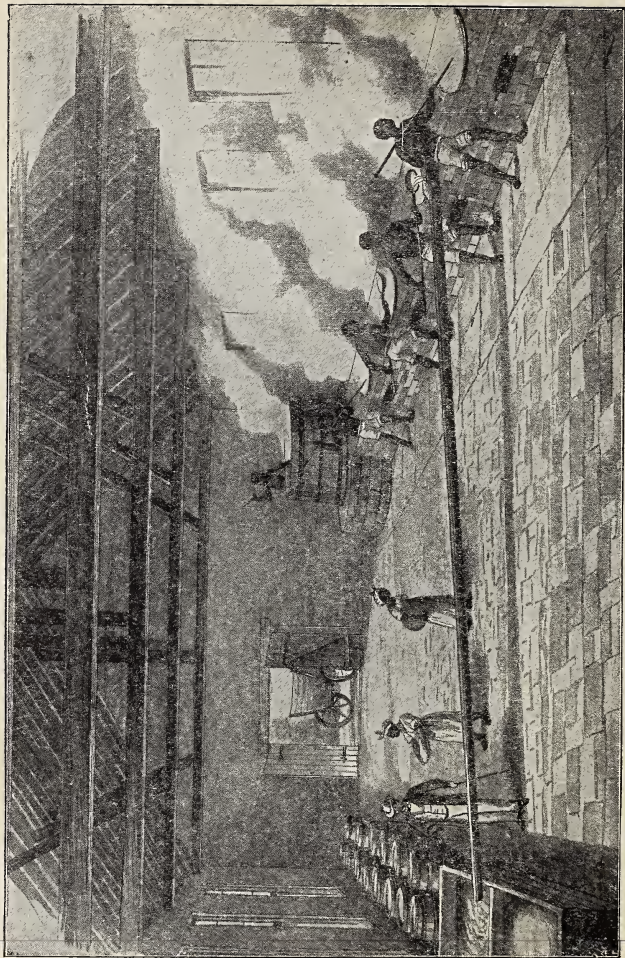
the old days when the poor slaves made the sugar.

They poured the liquid into a great many tubs with little holes at the bottom of them ; and it was left to stand a long time—till the molasses had slowly drained through and left the sugar behind.

But in the great sugar houses of to-day, this is all done on a different plan, and in a much shorter time. When the juice has been purified by settling, boiling and filtering it through large filters of bone black, it is ready to be boiled into sugar.

It is now placed in a large boiler with a dome-shaped top. This is the vacuum pan. The air and steam are pumped out of the pan as fast as the steam is formed, and the liquid boils at a very low temperature.

When good-sized crystals begin to form in the pan, the liquid is poured into a machine called the mixer, where it is thoroughly stirred. From the mixer it is taken to small steel drums; each drum has a wire screen basket inside of it and the sugar is poured into this basket, then the basket is made to revolve very fast and the



BOILING THE SUGAR.

molasses is all driven out through the screen, leaving the crystals as we have them.

The raw sugar-cane, after all the juice has been squeezed out, is used for fuel to make the steam used in boiling the sugar and running the engine in the factory. It burns well, and there is plenty to be had, and it does not cost a penny.

Most of the sugar made in the West Indies is packed in great casks, and sent to Europe, and the United States.

After it gets there some of it goes through another process, and is made quite white, and some is made into tall cone-shaped loaves. This is called "lump-sugar;" that in most common use on our tables is called "granulated;" while that shipped from the islands is known as "raw sugar."

Aunt Martha had hardly finished speaking when Charley, who was seated before the fire with his elbows on his knees and his chin between his hands, observed that monkeys had a better time of it than boys had. If he had been a monkey, he should not have minded. Just think how pleasant it would be to pop down among those sugar canes!

Richard said he did not think so. Charley might like the chances of being shot, and roasted for a black man's dinner; but he preferred less sugar and a safe life. Not that he pitied the monkeys for being shot; it served them right for being so greedy as to pull down the canes.

Charley could not agree with this. "Sugar," he said, "is so tempting—nobody knows how tempting," added he, rising and looking wistfully at the old-fashioned sugar-bowl heaped up with lumps of sugar, which Sally was taking out of the corner cupboard. That bowl was very full—too full; he feared that top lump would topple over. A remark which made Aunt Martha smile, and say that if he could find a safer place for it, he might.

Charley said he knew of one much safer; and opening his mouth, waited for Sally to put it in. Then he thanked his aunt by an embrace, and they sat down to tea.

The next morning the two boys were up early, and went into the kitchen just as Sally was putting the coffee-berries into the mill to grind for breakfast. Charley asked where they came from, and what they were. Old Sally said she

was not book-learned; if they wanted to know, they had better ask their aunt.

The boys said they must; but that when they got back to school they would try to learn a few things for themselves.

Sally though they had better be quick about it; for if they did not learn while they were young, they were not likely to know anything when they were old. And there were not many Aunt Marthas in the world. What a long tale she had told them last night!—too long, said she slyly.

Charley said, Not a bit. He meant to ask for a longer one to-night. He wanted to know all about the coffee.

So when Annt Martha came down, it was agreed that her next tale should be—"The Story of the Coffee."

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF THE COFFEE.

When the morning sun shines cheerily in at the window, and the snow-white cloth is spread on the table, coffee is always present. There are few breakfast-tables in the land where it is not to be found.

You may know it is there by the pleasant odor it spreads around. It is as nice to drink as tea, and a great deal more strengthening. Many a poor man can work hard from morning till night, and not drink anything stronger than coffee.

It was a long time before coffee was brought to the civilized countries of Europe; but in the reign of Oliver Cromwell, an English merchant who used to go backwards and forwards to Turkey to trade brought a Greek servant home with him. This man had tasted coffee—for the Turks drank a great deal of it, just as the Chinese drink a great deal of tea—and he knew how nice it was.

He brought some berries home with him, and used to make coffee, and let people in London have some of it. Indeed, he at last became so famous for his coffee, and so much talked about, that he set up a coffee-house in Lombard Street, that is, a house where coffee is sold instead of beer.

From this little coffee-house in Lombard Street, the habit of drinking coffee spread all over the country.

At first, like tea, it cost a good deal of money; and it was brought from only one small province in Arabia, called *Yemen*.

I should tell you that Arabia is divided into three parts. One is all stones and rock; and another all sand and desert. But there is a third region, called "Happy Arabia," that is full of gardens and vineyards, and olive-trees. And here is the province of Yemen. The finest coffee in the world grows in "Happy Arabia."

But all Arabs do not live in "Happy Arabia." Many of them live on the desert or on the edges of it, yet I believe they are just as happy as any people in the world, for the desert is their home and all over the world people believe that there is "no place like home."

Can you imagine a great sea of loose reddish sand, not level, but in great waves and low hillocks instead of rolling water? Shut your eyes and see if you can see this great desert of sand with not a tree, a house, a stream, or drop of water of any kind; not a person or animal. Can you imagine how very, very still it must be, and how very lonely it would seem?

As it never rains on the desert, no trees, shrubs, or even grass can grow. The springs soon dry up and nothing is left but the burning sand. Of course, no one can live for any length of time in such a place as that, but around the edges of the desert it sometimes rains, and then the soft green grass springs up; there are wells of cool water, and tall beautiful date palms wave their graceful plumes of leaves and hold up their treasures of luscious fruit. Here may be found low tents of striped camel's hair cloth in which the Arab and his family are dozing through the hot mid-day hours. In a shady spot several camels lie contentedly. The tent is supported by two or three long poles, and the door folds back like a curtain. The inside of the tent is divided by a curtain of white cloth into two

rooms, one for the men, and the other for the women and children.

When the great red sun has set, and a cooling breeze begins to blow across the hot sands, the family will get up and come out to breathe the sweet air. The father seats himself upon a rare mat or rug before the door and smokes his long pipe; the children come out and roll upon the ground, or dig their bare feet into the soft sand, or pile it into mounds. The maids busy themselves preparing the evening meal; they milk a camel, pound the coffee berries in a mortar and when all is ready a maid brings to the Arab a bowl of fresh milk, steaming cups of the most delicious coffee, dates, and rolls of hard, brown bread. When the father has finished his supper the mother and her children eat of what is left. After them the servants have their supper.

But it has not rained here for many weeks and the Arab notices that the camels have eaten almost all the grass and the water in the well is very low. They must move on to where there are more springs of water. The next morning, while the stars are still shining, the tents are taken down and rolled up, the poles are tied to-



gether, the mats and rugs are made into bundles and everything is soon strapped to the faithful camels. Large bags made of camel-skin are filled with water and fixed to the back of the camel; this is the only water they will have to drink until they reach their journey's end. No water is carried for the camels. Before leaving the old well, each took a long, long drink, and he will not need any more for four or five days.

The camels kneel upon the sand while they are being loaded and when all is ready and the mother and children have been lifted to their comfortable seats upon the backs of two of the camels, the father mounts his beautiful Arabian horse and leads the way. In no other part of the world are to be found such beautiful horses, and the Arab's horse is his dearest treasure. He feeds it with his own hand, even allows it to sleep in his part of the tent, and could not be persuaded to sell it. Although the horse is so beautiful and so dear to his master's heart, it is not so useful as the camel, whose large flat feet are made for traveling on the loose sand and do not sink in as do those of the horse. The camel furnishes milk for a nourishing drink, its flesh

is good food, its fine soft hair makes excellent cloth, and no other animal could travel over the hot deserts so long without food or water.

Soon our travelers have left the old home far behind, and when the sun rises he looks down upon the little train of travelers alone on the desert. Not a tree is to be seen, and soon the heat grows so intense that they stop and the tent is hastily put up. After a breakfast of milk, coffee, and dates, they all lie down in the tents to sleep until sunset. The camels, too, lie down to sleep beside their drivers in the shade of a rock. As soon as the sun sets they will journey on for many hours, for they wish to reach a cool, pleasant oasis of palm trees and clear streams of water before the camels begin to suffer from thirst.

After three or four days of travel they see in the distance a grove of date palms. What a welcome sight! The camels smell the water and hurry forward, and before many hours they are resting in the cool shade and refreshing themselves with the water from the clear spring. Here they will stay so long as the water lasts or there is grass enough for the camels, then

they will move further on. Do you see why they prefer tents to houses?

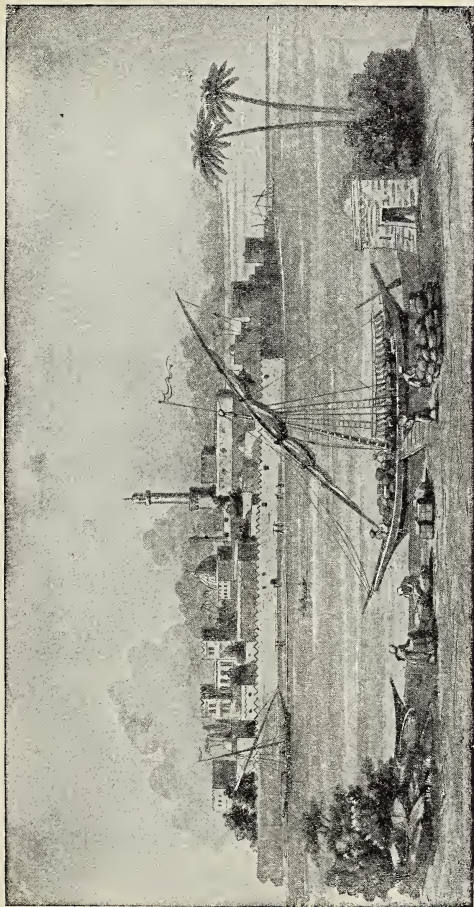
The people of Arabia are very dark, with straight noses, full lips, dark earnest eyes, and very dark hair. The men wear upon their heads a turban made of a rich shawl with beautiful fringe; this is twisted about the head in such a way as to protect the head and neck from the intense heat. Instead of a coat, a loose garment called a tunic hangs from his shoulders. It is often made of very bright, beautiful material and is held in place by a cord of gold. The boy's dress is much like his father's and the little girl is a small image of her mother, who wears a loose, brown, cotton dress, falling in folds from her bare shoulders to her feet. Her arms and ankles are also bare and about them are clasped bracelets and anklets of gold. Upon her head she wears a fine fringed handkerchief put on in such a way that it can be drawn before the face below the eyes when she is upon the street. The street, did I say? Yes, for the Arabs do not all live in tents on the burning sand. In places where the springs do not dry up, the people have built cities. They do not look much like our cities,

for the streets are very narrow and the houses are built close to the street, and the gardens, when there are any, are in the open court inside. The houses are made of bricks of baked clay and are flat roofed. No doubt we should be very homesick in Arabia, but the little Arab thinks it the pleasantest place in the world.

Mocha is the chief town, and the place where the coffee came from. It stands close to the seashore, on a very sandy plain, and at the entrance to the Red Sea.

The entrance to the Red Sea is through some dangerous straits called "Bab-el-mandeb," or "the Gate of Tears," because so many ships are wrecked there. Indeed, the Arab, who is very fanciful, says that the spirit of the storm is always perched on a rock that over looks the straits.

Any lady in Mocha, when she goes out for an evening visit, carries on her arm a little bag of coffee, and has it boiled when she gets there. And all over the town people are to be seen lying on the ground under awnings spread to screen them from the sun. These are their coffee-houses; and there they do nothing all day but sip coffee and smoke their pipes.



THE CITY OF MOCHA.

The people at Mocha pretend that they like coffee best when it is made of the husk of the coffee-berry, and not of the berry itself.

But all the coffee that Mocha and the province round could supply was very little, compared to what comes to Europe and the United States now; and of course the price of coffee was extremely high. So, when it began to be so much liked, the kings and queens in the different countries of Europe set about having coffee planted in all places where it would grow.

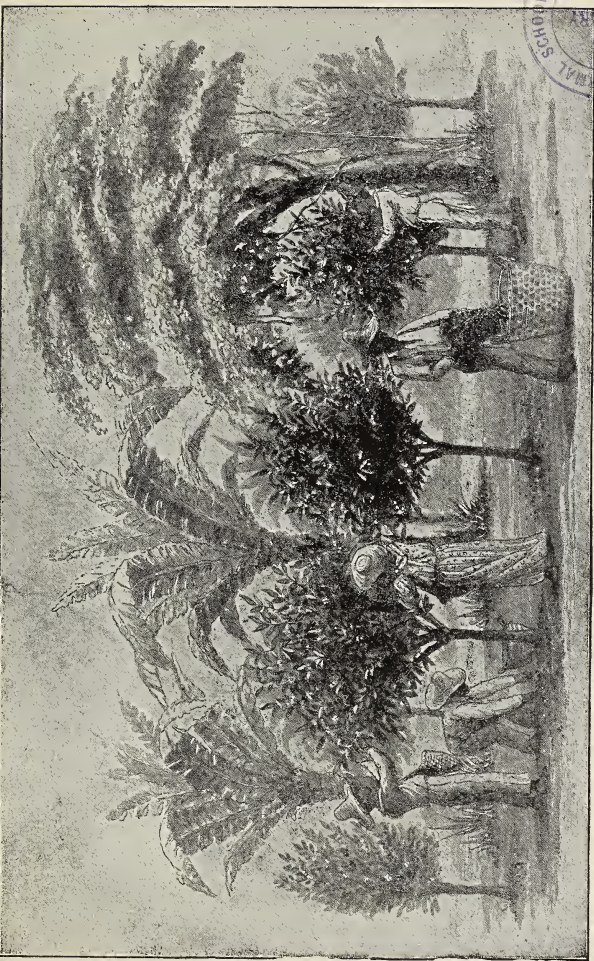
The French sent some coffee-plants to one of their islands in the West Indies, in order to have a plantation there. An officer had the care of the plants, and he sailed in a ship from Amsterdam.

He had a long and very stormy voyage, so long, in fact, that the water on board was nearly all used up, and no more was to be had until they came to their journey's end. Each man was allowed only a very small quantity a day, and they often suffered from thirst.

The French officer had no more given to him than the rest, and he would gladly have quenched his thirst. But, alas! the tender plants he was cherishing with such care began to droop.



A COFFEE PLANTATION.



They too wanted water; and rather than let them die, he went without himself, and poured the scanty supply given him on their roots.

The crew laughed at him, and he had to bear a great many rude speeches. But, thanks to this act of self-denial, the plants were able to live until the vessel came to land. Then the brave officer received his reward. The plants grew and multiplied, and covered great plantations from which other countries and islands were supplied.

Many places now furnish coffee in the greatest abundances. Brazil sends out almost enough to supply the world. The plant had grown wild in the island of Ceylon from the earliest times; and the natives used to pluck the leaves and mix them with their food to give it a flavor; they also made garlands of its flowers to decorate their temples; but it was a very long time before they made any use of the berries.

When the coffee-plant is left to nature it grows about thirty feet tall. But, as a rule, its top is cut off to make it throw out more branches, so that in the coffee plantations the trees are not over five or seven feet high.

The evergreen leaves are slender and about five inches long and have a bright shiny surface. The flowers are white, and a little like those of the jessamine, and are found at the axil of the leaf.



BRANCH OF COFFEE-PLANT IN FLOWER—AND FRUIT.

When the berry is ripe it is red and looks like a great cherry. There are two hard seeds in it, like beans, that are known to every one, for they are ground into coffee. In many plantations they fall to the ground, and lie under the tree

until they are picked up. But in Arabia this is not allowed. The planter, as he is called, spreads a cloth on the ground, and then shakes the tree, so that the ripe berries drop off. He then puts them on mats, and lets them lie in the sun till they are dry. And then the husk is broken by a roller, and the berries taken out. All his trouble is amply repaid, for this Arabian coffee is the best in the world.

Coffee grows wild in several places in Africa, and its use probably started from the tribes living in those countries. This was a very long time ago and now coffee is used by all the civilized nations of the world. The coffee berry or bean, as it is sometimes called, is shaped very much like the half of a bean, and is usually of a greenish gray color when taken from the shell. But the coffee we buy of the grocer is of a dark brown color and has a strong odor. This is because the bean has been roasted. Without roasting the bean would be of but little use, as we could not get from it the qualities that make coffee so useful a drink.

The beans are shipped in large sacks, and are roasted after they reach the large cities where

they are to be used. After roasting, the coffee must be ground to a coarse powder before it is ready for the coffee pot. The grocer usually buys the whole berry and grinds it as it is sold; this is because people want to be certain that they get pure coffee.

There are many things, such as the root of the chicory plant, barley, dandelion roots and even burnt crusts of bread, that can be mixed with the coffee, and this is often done to make the coffee go further, and when the coffee is ground these cannot be seen. We sometimes see ground coffee put up in paper packages ready for use; this is sold very cheap, and is usually a mixture of coffee and chicory.

The coffee-plant has a great many enemies. Wild cats climb up the stem and run along the branches to get at the berries; and the squirrel nibbles them as he does nuts; to say nothing of the monkeys, who are always ready for a taste.

In Ceylon, there is a kind of rat that lives in the forest, and makes its nest in the roots of the trees. It comes into the plantation in swarms to feed on the berries. Its teeth are as sharp as a pair of scissors, and it gnaws through the

branch that has the fruit upon it, and lets it fall to the ground, where it can feast at its leisure. It is very provoking to the planter to find all the delicate twigs and branches cut off, and he wages war against the rats.

The natives of the opposite coast of India think the flesh of the rat, fed as it is on such delicate fare, very nice, and they come and work in the plantations on purpose to get as many of them as they can. They fry them in oil and season them with hot spices, and call the dish "corrie."

The little boys were sorry when Aunt Martha came to the end of her "story of the coffee," and wanted to know a great many things about the brave man who went without drinking, in order to water the plants and get them safe to their journey's end.

Aunt Martha could not answer all their questions, for she was tired of talking, and wanted her tea. But she made a promise that the next time she went to the city, if Charley and Richard were along, she would take them into a restaurant and give them each a cup of coffee.

Charley said it was a long time to wait for that

treat; but if their aunt would let them, they should like to get up a little sooner each morning and grind the coffee for breakfast, as Aunt Martha had a little mill of her own and ground her coffee as she used it. And then they remembered old Sally's ignorance, and how they must tell her where the coffee came from, and all about it.

Yes, it was very pleasant indeed to know a few things, and to be able to teach other people. And Richard thought of a little schoolfellow of his, and of how much he should have to tell him when he got back to school.

When old Sally brought in the tea, she set a dish of new-laid eggs upon the table, and Aunt Martha gave one to each of her guests. Charley was talking away, and not thinking of what he was doing, so he upset the salt-cellar, and spilt all the salt on the table-cloth. Aunt Martha asked him if he knew where salt came from. He answered very quickly, "From the grocery." But then Richard wanted to know where the grocer got it.

Instead of telling them, Aunt Martha said it was well for Charley that he did not live in olden times, when salt was very scarce, or he would

have got into disgrace for wasting it. For in those days it was dear, and people took much more care of it than they do now. One large salt-cellar used to be set in the middle of the dinner-table, and everybody helped himself to a little. It was the custom for the master and mistress to sit above the salt-cellar, and all the servants to take their places below it.

Yes, indeed, he would have got into trouble then if he had spilt the salt. And Aunt Martha promised that to-morrow night she should tell them—"The Story of the Salt."

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORY OF THE SALT.

There is something on the lower shelf of the corner cupboard, that is of more importance than many of its neighbors.

You might contrive to live without either tea or coffee, as people were obliged to do in years gone by before they knew anything about these drinks. But what would you do without salt? What would become of your nice relishing dishes, if salt did not season them? They would taste no better than white of egg.

Nay, you would not have those rosy cheeks, nor be able to scamper about from morning till night as you do now. You would be pale and sickly; and I hardly think you could live without the little harmless doses of salt you are always taking in some form or other.

On the great plains in the western part of the United States, where large herds of cattle are kept, the cattle and the deer come a long way to get a taste of salt. The salt is in some well or spring that bubbles up among the grass; and the

water leaves it behind like a crust on the stones that may chance to be lying about; and the grass all round tastes very much of salt.

The place is called a "salt-lick," because the cattle keep licking at the stones. They are sure to find their way to the salt-lick, even though they live miles from it. And they keep cropping the grass, and licking the salt, till they have had enough, and then they go home again. They make a path on the grass with their hoofs, and quite tread it down. Years ago, when these plains were the home of the buffalo, hunters used to lie in wait by these paths, and shoot the animals as they came along.

The man who owns the salt-lick very often begins to bore down into the ground. He thinks he may find a salt-mine, or, at least, a way underground that leads to one, and then he can get quite rich and become a person of importance.

A man once came to a salt-lick and tasted the water. He found it was all right, and that when he boiled some in a kettle and let it get cold there was a crust of salt at the bottom. He was highly delighted, and bought the land, and set

people on to bore. But, alas! there was no salt to be found anywhere. A cunning hunter had put salt into the spring, and sprinkled it on the grass, to entice the deer, and make them believe the place was a salt-lick. And so the poor man had spent his money for nothing!

In some places the salt-licks are very far apart, and the cattle can hardly ever get to them. The cattle have plenty of food, and large rich pastures to browse in; but they long for a bit of salt, and there is none for them. Once a fortnight their master lets them come home to the farm, and gives each of them a bit of salt. The cows and horses know the right day as well as can be, and they set off at full gallop to the farm. The farmer is quite ready for them; and when they have had their salt they trot back again to the fields, as contented as possible.

In Norway, when the farmer's wife goes out with her maidens to collect her cows and have them milked, she takes a bowl of salt in her hand. The moment the cows see it, they come running up from all parts of the field, as if asking for some. Their mistress gives each of them a large spoonful, and expects them to be satis-



SALT DESERT IN AFRICA.

fied. But sometimes a cow is greedy, and wants more, and keeps pressing to the bowl until it becomes quite troublesome; and then the mistress gives it a box on the ears with the wooden spoon, to teach it better manners.

There is a desert in Africa where the ground under foot is not sand, but salt. It is called the "Salt Desert;" and the salt sparkles in the sun with such a crystal whiteness that people who travel upon it are almost blinded.

Because salt is so useful and so necessary, it is found in great abundance. The great wide sea could not keep sweet and fresh without salt. People put the sea-water in large shallow pans, and let the sun dry it up. The salt found at the bottom is called "bay salt," and is very bitter. And sometimes it is mixed with other things—such as a relation called Epsom salts, that has a disagreeable taste, and is used as a medicine.

But the salt makes its way from the sea by all kinds of secret paths under the ground, and then it is found in places called mines, and is named "rock salt." The mine is like a great deep cavern, and has tall pillars of salt to hold up the roof; and the roof, and the walls, and the pillars

glitter as though they were covered with precious stones.

When any person of consequence comes to visit the mine, the men who are at work make a great illumination. They stick torches here and there as thickly as they can, and then light them up, so that the place looks like a fairy palace.

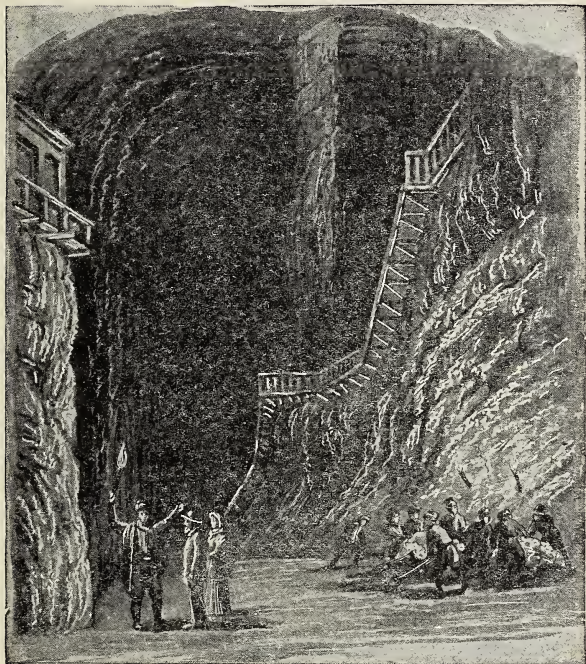
The mine I am speaking of is near the town of Cracow in Poland. A person enters the mine by being let down in a hammock by means of a rope; and he goes down, down, a very long way. And then when he stops, he is not at his journey's end; for he has to get out of his hammock, and go along a pathway that descends lower and lower, till it reaches the mine.

The pathway is sometimes cut into steps, like a great wide staircase, and glitters with the light of the torches that the miners carry in their hands. And the road leads through a great chamber or room where a thousand people might dine.

When the traveller reaches the mine he finds himself in a country under ground, such as perhaps he had no idea of before.

There is neither sun nor sky. But there are

cross-roads, with horses, and carriages going along them. And there are crowds of men, women,



A SALT MINE.

and children, who live always in the mine. Some of the children have lived there all their lives, and have never seen the daylight.

Most of the horses, when once taken down, do not come up again. There are numbers of caverns, little and big, and some of them are made into stables, and the horses are kept there. The roofs of the caverns are supported on pillars of salt, and roads branch from them in all directions. They reach so far, and wind about so much, that a man may easily get lost. If his torch happens to go out, he wanders about till his strength is quite gone; and if nobody finds him, he lies down and dies.

I have read of a salt-mine—also in Poland—in which there is a pretty chapel cut out of the salt, and called the “Chapel of St. Antony.”

The King of Poland used to be the owner of the mines; but Poland has no king now, and they belong to Austria.

There are also salt mines in England and other countries; but the fine white salt we use on our tables comes from salt springs or wells. Salt wells are numerous in New York, Ohio, and Michigan, and some other states. The water from these wells is evaporated, either by the sun or by fire, and the salt remains in the kettle.

In most places, large flat pans are used for evaporating the brine. The pans are set over a fire place having a large chimney at one end.

In Syracuse, New York, there is quite a village of these chimneys, as extensive salt-works are located there.

Aunt Martha concluded by remarking how much pleasanter it is to live above ground, and see the cheerful light of the sun, and to walk in the green fields, and to breathe the fresh air. Do not the boys think so?

Charley said he did; but if he ever went down into a mine he should mind and take a box of matches with him. He thought then if his torch went out, he should stand quite still and light it again.

Aunt Martha agreed with him that it would be the best plan, but she hoped they might never have a chance of trying it.

Charley wondered at the cattle liking salt so much. He could understand their liking sugar, but salt was not nice at all—and he put a little into the palm of his hand to taste. It was very well with egg or potatoes, but he should not like to lick it as the cattle did.

Richard said the coachman had told him that salt was very good for horses, and made their coats finer; and that when they could not get it they were neither so well nor so handsome.

Aunt Martha said that was quite true.

But at this moment their attention was diverted by Sally's placing on the table a large plum-cake. Now the boys had seen this cake being made, and had asked old Sally ever so many questions about the currants she was putting into it. Did they grow on trees? Did they come from the same country as the coffee? For Charley had told her the history of the coffee—and indeed all the other stories.

So the arrival of the cake brought the currants to mind, and both the boys began to question their aunt about them. But Aunt Martha said it was tea-time now, and she could not answer any questions. She hoped they would find the cake all the nicer for the currants that were in it, as she believed old Sally had put them in on purpose for them. At which Charley laughed a merry laugh, and begged Aunt Martha, if she were rested by to-morrow night, to tell them—"The Story of the Currants."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF THE CURRANTS.

People use quite a wrong word when they talk about *currants*, meaning the currants we buy at the grocer's, and which are not in the least degree related to the red and white bunches that hang in summer from the bushes in the garden.

The mistake arose from Corinth, the name of one of the places where the currants grow. People chose to speak of them as "Corinths," and in time the word became changed into *currants*. Currants, indeed! Why, they belong to the elegant family of grapes, that hang in white and purple clusters in the vineyards abroad. They too grow upon a vine, and are nothing in the world but grapes!

It is also as much a mistake to call them *plums*, and talk about a "plum-pudding," when there is not a single plum to be found in it.

The little bush-like vine, on which the currants grow, requires a great deal of care. It has to be supported on sticks, and to have the earth loos-

ened every now and then about the roots. It is subject to blight, and if the weather is too wet,



CLUSTER OF GRAPES.

is apt to be spoiled, and even killed. At all times it is very slow in bringing forth its fruit,

and the little grapes do not appear until the tree is six years old.

This grape grows in some sunny islands near to Greece, in a sea called the Ionian Sea. If ever you read the history of Greece, you will find a great deal about the Ionian Islands.

There are seven of them, and one of them is called Zante. It has high cliffs, and a pier where the people land from the ships and the boats. All kinds of persons are seen to land from the boats, and it is a pretty sight to watch their different costumes and faces. There is the Greek, and the Venetian, and a great many other foreigners; and among them is sure to be the Englishman.

The island is only sixty miles round, and there is a great plain stretching over nearly all of it, and some hills in the distance. There are pretty villages, and houses and gardens, and groves of oranges and lemons; and to stand on the hills and look over the plain, you would think it was one great vineyard.

About the end of August, the grapes on the little bushy vines are ready to gather. The people in the island never eat plum-pudding or

plum-cake, and they do not want the currants—for so, I think, I must call them, in spite of the word being wrong—they do not want the currants for themselves.

But these currants found their way to England, and then to the United States, and large quantities are used in both countries. So a great many men, women, and children are sent into the vineyards to gather the currants, and to get them ready for market.

They pick off the little grapes, and lay them upon the stone floor of a room or shed, that has no roof, and is open to the sky. The sun pours down his beams upon them, and very soon dries them. If the weather keeps fine, all is well. But now and then there comes a great thunder-storm, and the rain pours in torrents. Then the currants begin to ferment, and are quite spoiled. So the owner does not try to sell them, but feeds them to his horses, and cows, and sheep.

If the weather is fine, the currants get quite dry, and then they are taken away to a warehouse, and poured through a hole in the roof until the warehouse is full. This makes them

cake together, as you see when you open a packet of them.

In the warehouse they cake so much, that men have to dig them out with sharp instruments, when the time has come for putting them into barrels. Then a man used to get into the barrel, without shoes or stockings, and trample them down as they were poured in. And there were barrels enough to fill five or six ships.

I should tell you that when the currants are brought to the warehouse, the keeper of the place has a paper given to him, saying how many of them there are. And in olden days a great fuss was made about the currants. The island belonged to the city of Venice, which was then in its glory. And five grave senators dressed in their robes used to meet to decide what the price of the currants was to be. And no one might buy them without asking leave of the Government.

When the English came into power, they did rather a foolish thing. They laid a heavy tax on the currants, so that to eat them in puddings was like eating money. But very few people would buy them, and the little vines were neg-

lected and left to die. The owners of them lost all their money, and had to borrow of the Jews. Indeed, there was so much grumbling, and so many complaints were made, that the tax had to be altered, and then the price of currants came down.

So many ship-loads of currants are taken from the island that the people of Zante used to wonder what we did with them all. They were quite certain that we used them in dyeing cloth.

When Charley heard that currants were really grapes, he jumped up to pick one off the dish and put it into water. There it lay and swelled itself out, till he could see quite plainly that it was a small, round grape.

While Charley was looking at it on the palm of his hand, Richard brought the map, that Aunt Martha might show them where the island of Zante was. But she would only open the atlas at the right map, and it took them a very long time to find Zante.

Then they had a little talk about the high cliffs, and the pier, and the motley group of strangers who landed there. Richard knew what a pier was, for he had seen the one at Bos-

ton. He remembered very well how the boats came, and set people down at the bottom of a flight of steps; and then he saw a great number of persons mount the stairs, and come on to the pier.

Aunt Martha said there was one thing she thought the little boys would not like, if they went to Zante. It was a very lovely island, but every now and then they might feel the ground under their feet begin to tremble, and perhaps the house they lived in might be shaken down. Since she could remember, there had been such a severe shock of earthquake that the town of Zante was almost destroyed.

An earthquake must be a terrible thing, Richard thought. But now he had found Corinth on the map: was there anything interesting to be said about that? Yes. And Aunt Martha asked them if they could tell her who lived at Corinth for more than a year, and taught the people that Jesus, who had been crucified, was the Messiah.

The boys looked very grave, and were obliged to confess they did not know. So then their aunt told them it was St. Paul; and that while he was there he wrote his Letter, or Epistle, as

we call it, to the Romans. As soon as they were old enough, they would read for themselves what he had said in that letter.

Charley said the word Corinth was not much like the word currant. And he did not like the idea of the currants being trodden down in the barrels by men with naked feet. Richard said currants were dirty things, and he liked raisins better. Were they grapes too? Aunt Martha told them they were a larger kind of grape, which came from Spain, or California.

As the atlas was on the table, they might as well show her where Spain was.

She had a few raisins in her corner cupboard, and if Charley liked to put one in water, he would see what a large grape it was.

Aunt Martha was about to rise and reach out the raisins, when she dropped her needle. For after tea she had taken it up to mend a hole in Richard's glove. Charley soon found the needle, but when he had picked it up he began to look at it. Where did needles come from? Who made them? And how did they manage to make that hole for the eye?

Aunt Martha had found the raisins, and would

only talk about them now. One thing, she said, was enough at once. To-morrow night she would answer his questions.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STORY OF THE RICE.

The yellow corn that waves in the field is one of the most useful plants that grows. It feeds hundreds and thousands of persons, and has been called "the staff of life." But rice feeds millions—nay, hundreds of millions!

Just open the map of Asia and look at it. Do you see the great peninsula of Hindustan? and do you see China, and Japan, and the islands around about? And turn to another map, where the New World is spread out before you. There, in the states of South Carolina, Louisiana, and Mississippi it is raised in large quantities, and it is also found in some places along the Danube river, where the rice grows and flourishes.

And all the swarming hosts of China and of India feed on rice, and it is to them what bread is to us—the staff of life.

People in those hot countries do not care for beef or mutton. A little boiled rice, seasoned with pepper, makes them a good dinner. In



A RICE FIELD IN GEORGIA.

the colder countries of Europe and America such is not the case. Rice is eaten, it is true, but rather smiled at for its simplicity. An Englishman would indeed look very blank, if he had nothing set before him but a dish of rice for his dinner.

The rice plant needs a great deal of moisture and a hot climate; so it is found in those places where there is a hot sun, and a great deal of rain, or where the fields can be covered with water from a lake or river.

When it does rain in the tropics, it pours in torrents, and comes from the clouds like a sheet of water. The water cannot run away all at once, and in some places forms a great lake. This is just the place for the rice to grow for it must be kept till nearly ripe with its head only just above water.

Most of the rice is raised in China, Japan and India. The farmers use the rudest kind of tools, and the buffalo for teams.

It is not very pleasant to work in the mud. But the farmer, and the buffalo that draws the plow, have to do it. They wade about as best they can; and here and there a bird with long legs, called a heron, stands patiently waiting for a fish in the middle of a rice-field, as if he thought fishes must be there.

And here and there is a little shed built on poles, with a man sitting inside it. A great many ropes are fastened to it, and spread over the field.

A number of scare-crows are tied to the ropes, and the man in the shed makes them jump up and down.

This is done to frighten away a flock of birds called "rice-birds," that love to pick out the grain while it is soft and milky. When the odd-looking



THE MAN IN THE SHED TO FRIGHTEN THE BIRDS.

figures, or scare-crows, begin to jump about, the birds that have been picking and eating, and doing all the mischief they can, rise in the air and fly away. But as soon as the scare-crows are at rest again, they come back, and go on feasting as if nothing had happened.

In a month or two the flood is gone, and the

field looks as if it were covered with a waving crop of barley. Then comes the busy time of harvest; and the villagers all turn out to reap, sometimes up to their knees in mud. This muddy part of the business is not very healthy, and the people who work in the rice-field often die of fever.

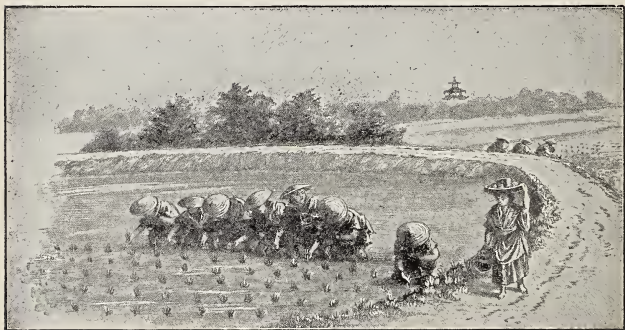
When there is no flood likely to come upon the ground, the water is made to stand upon it from some river. This process is called by the long name of "artificial irrigation." This is a common plan for getting water to the fields in countries where little or no rain falls.

We rarely need it in America where the clouds keep us amply supplied; and we seldom meet with such a machine as a water-wheel, set up for the purpose of pumping water on the land. Nor do we often coax our rivers and streams uphill, and then let them run down into the valleys. But all this is done in countries where it does not rain for months at a time.

Some Chinese farmers are very fond of making terraces on the banks of a river, for their rice to grow upon. They plow the land with the help of the buffalo, for horses are not used.

Both man and buffalo wade in mud, and seem quite contented.

Then, when the land has been plowed, the rice-plants are brought from a hot-bed, and set in holes made on purpose. The holes are full of water, that has been pumped up from the river by the water-wheel. It is pumped up to the



CHINAMEN SETTING THE RICE.

top terrace, and then is let to run down all over the rest.

This pumping goes on until the rice-stalks begin to turn yellow. Then the Chinaman knows that the plants have had enough, and stops.

When the crops are ripe, the terraces have a

green and beautiful appearance, and look like gardens.

Sometimes the little trickling rill is led many miles along the country to a rice-field that wants water; and no trouble is thought too great to ensure a plentiful crop.

There is a kind of rice that does not require all this watering. It is called mountain-rice, and grows in the island of Sumatra, where it rains every few days. When the crop has been gathered in, the land is allowed to lie fallow for a time, and then it becomes covered with great jungle-grass as much as twelve feet high. In this tall grass the tiger hides himself, or the rhinoceros comes to graze.

But when the ground is wanted for another crop, the tall grass has to be burned off. As soon as the fire is lighted, a loud, rustling noise is heard, and the great column of flame rises and sweeps along, till the whole ground is covered with a sheet of fire.

If the traveller sees the column in the distance, he takes care to escape it if he can. But sometimes it is too quick in its march for him to get away, and then woe betide him!

In our own country the rice-fields can be drained before they are plowed, so the workmen and teams do not have to wade through mud and water. Before the plants are set, the field is covered with about two inches of water, and is flooded as often after planting as is necessary for a good crop.

When the rice is ripe, it is cut, bound into bundles and stacked, like wheat. The hull sticks to the grain very tightly, so it is difficult to remove by threshing. Much of this work is done by hand.

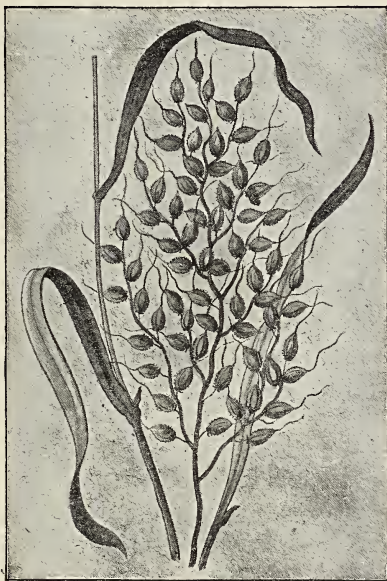
When Aunt Martha had finished her story, she got up, and opening her corner cupboard, reached down a jar of rice for the boys to look at. After that she showed them a picture of the plant itself as it looks when growing. It had three ears on the top of each stalk, and each ear had awns to it.

Charley said it was almost, only not quite, like barley.

Richard said he should like to see a Chinaman plowing with his buffaloes, in the mud. He had once seen a Chinese giant: he wore his hair in a long pigtail down his back.

Charley asked what the ladies did to make their feet so small.

Aunt Martha said that when they were babies,



RICE-PLANT.

their feet were fastened up in tight bandages, so that they could not grow. When Charley got home, he must ask his papa to take him to the

museum, and show him all the curious things that were there.

Aunt Martha had seen the museum long ago, and knew that a great many things in it had been brought from China.

The boys then began to talk about the rice-puddings they had so many of at school. Charley said he should like them better, now that he knew so many people lived on rice, without any meat at all.

Aunt Martha observed that everything in her corner cupboard had told them its story. The tea-cup, and the tea, and the sugar, and the coffee, and the rice, and the salt, and the currants. It was well they were going home so soon, for there would be no more tales to tell. Yes, she believed everything had told them its story.

Charley asked if he might see, and, before his aunt had time to reply, he had jumped on a chair, and was peering into her cupboard. What was that yellow jar hidden up so snug? What had that inside it?

Aunt Martha said that indeed she had forgotten that; it was her honey-jar. If they liked, she would tell them a tale about Honey to finish with; it would be short and sweet.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY OF THE HONEY.

Most of the things in my corner cupboard have been made, or, as it is called, *manufactured*, by man. And if he has not made them, he has at least prepared and got them ready for use. Even the tea, and the coffee, and the sugar have to pass through his hands before they come to the table.

But I am going now to tell you about something with which he has very little to do. He has neither made nor prepared it, and yet it is something we all like very much, and should be sorry to do without.

The garden in summer-time is full of bright-colored flowers, the rose, and the honeysuckle, and the jessamine that climbs over the porch; and the white lily, and the pink, and the carnation and many others. Now in the deep recess of the flower a sweet juice lies hidden. It is not honey, but it is the stuff out of which honey is made.

A hundred little workmen are busy carrying

away the juice—or, as it is called, the nectar—for the very purpose of making honey. You will guess that I mean the bees. But the bees are very knowing, and they do not take the nectar out of all the flowers; they skip over some, as if they did not like them.



THE BEE'S TONGUE—ENLARGED.



THE BEE'S LEG—ENLARGED.

The bee is very intent on its work. It lives in the hive by the garden wall: though it has plenty of relatives who do not live in a hive, but make their nests out in the fields and woods; but they all carry on the same trade,—that of honey-making.

No one can take any liberties with the bee, because it is armed with a sharp little sword, called a sting; but it is worth while to stand a minute and see what it is about.

It has a tongue which is a great deal too long for its mouth, so it lies folded down on its breast. When the bee settles on a flower, it thrusts its long tongue deep into the very bottom of it. The tongue is like a sponge, and sucks up all the nectar. The nectar passes along the body of the bee to a curious little bag called the honey-bag, and that seems made on purpose to hold it.

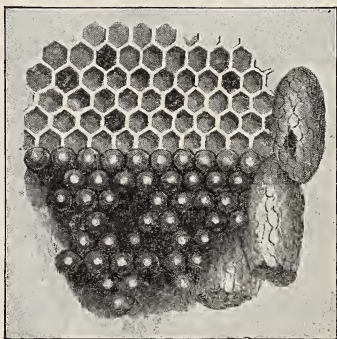
By-and-by the bees fly off home to the hive with their honey-bags quite full. The hive, as you know, has a great many cells in it made of wax, and they form what is called the honey-comb.

The bee pushes its head into a cell, and empties the honey by drops out of its honey-bag; and then comes another bee, and does the same, till the cell is quite full; and then it is closed up with a waxen lid to keep out the air.

I do not pretend to find out a secret known only to the bee, but it is quite certain that the nectar by some means or other has become changed in-

to honey. It is full of little bright crystals like sugar, and has a pleasant smell, and a taste I need hardly describe.

All over the country, in the gardens and fields are the little honey-makers at work from morning till night. They are doing it to lay up a store of food for themselves. But honey is very



PART OF A HONEY-COMB.

nice, and the wax that they make their comb of is very useful; so the bee is robbed every year.

It would not be easy to rob the hive in an open and straightforward way, because of the sharp little swords I have told you about. But the owner of the hive gets some round white balls that are found in the fields, and are called

furze balls, and sets them on fire under the hive. The smoke gets in among the bees, and makes them drop down as if they were dead.

But, I am happy to say, they come to life again, though not before their beautiful comb with all its nice honey has been taken from them.

When the honey has been poured out of the cells it is clear and liquid; but in this country, where the weather is never very hot, it soon hardens and thickens as you see when it is brought to the table.

A great many years ago, people used to drink a nice sweet wine called mead, and that was made of honey.

We never hear about meads in these days, when so many different sorts of wines are brought to us from other countries. But in olden times mead was held in very high esteem; and the person who made it, and who was called "the mead-maker," was thought to be of more importance than the doctor.

In these days, though mead is out of fashion, honey and wax are considered part of the riches of the country, and are bought and sold everywhere

There is a bird called the honey-guide, that lives in Africa, in the country of the Hottentots. It is rather larger than a sparrow, and is so fond of honey that it is always on the lookout to get some. There are no bee-hives in that country, but the bees make their nests in the hollow of a tree, or in some other sheltered place.

The bird is sure to find its way to the bee's-nest, but it does not like to attack it for fear of being stung. So it begins to call out in its own way for someone else to come; it makes a loud piercing cry, that is well known by all who are within hearing.

Sometimes the bear is lurking about among the trees, and he hears it; and by-and-by he sees the bird perched on some branch close by. The bird flies towards the nest of the poor unsuspecting bees, and the bear follows; for he loves the taste of honey, and this is not the first time, by any means, that he has gone after the honey-guide. He does not care much about the stings, though they sometimes put him into a great passion. At any rate, he pulls out the nest with his feet and paws, and feasts on the honey; and while the bear is eating, the bird is sure to get as much as it wants.

The Hottentot knows the voice of the honey-guide, and follows it with great delight. When he reaches the nest, he does not forget his kind friend; he takes care to leave behind that part of the comb which contains the eggs and the little grubs, for the bird likes these even better than the honey.

And he would not catch or kill the honey-guide for any reward that could be offered. A traveller once told a Hottentot that he would give him any number of glass beads and a great deal of tobacco, if he would set a trap for the honey-guide. But the Hottentot would do nothing of the kind.

"The bird is our friend," he said, "and we will not betray it!"

Richard and Charley were very sorry when Aunt Martha came to the end of her story; and they might have said more about their regret that it was to be the last, had not Charley espied old Sally reaching the jar of honey out of the cupboard.

What was she going to do with it? Charley was not wrong in guessing; although, on sitting down to tea, he made believe to look surprised at

a nice slice of bread and honey on the plate before him. How good it was!

He asked Aunt Martha why she did not keep bees, she had so many flowers in the garden.

Aunt Martha said she thought about it, and that perhaps next time they came to see her, they might find that she had set up a bee-house.

Charley hoped, if Aunt Martha did keep bees, she would not have them killed when the honey was taken; it was a shame to kill them when they had worked so hard.

Richard said it was more cruel to take their honey, and leave them to starve.

Aunt Martha said so it was; but that if she kept bees, she meant to take care of them,—for to keep bees, or birds, or any living thing, and not to be kind to them, was very wicked indeed.

Richard said the boys at school kept rabbits, and sometimes forgot to feed them; but Charley had never forgotten to feed his. And he liked that Hottentot, and thought him a fine fellow for not betraying the honey-guide. He should have done just the same himself.

When tea was over, Aunt Martha said, as she had no knitting to do that night, she should not

mina playing a game at chess; they two might be on one side, and she would be on the other. So when old Sally had taken away the tea things and made up the fire, Richard brought out the chess-board, and he and Charley set the men.

When the game began, Aunt Martha said she was afraid she should be beaten,—it would be hard to play against them both. The boys did not think so; and they were right,—for they first lost their knights, then their bishops, and then, to Charley's dismay, their queen. Old Sally tapped at the door to take them off to bed, just as Aunt Martha had got their king into a corner, and contrived to say checkmate!

The next day, the boys returned to school. Aunt Martha was very sorry to part with them; but old Sally predicted that they were going back to learn, and she was not a bit afraid of their turning out dunces.

Old Sally was right; for the two boys had no sooner got back to school than they set to work in earnest; indeed, the very first thing they did was to pull out of the desk their dog-eared geography. They wanted to see if it said anything about the places their aunt had told them of in

her stories. When they found that it did, they hastened from one to another of the great maps which hung on the school-room wall, talking all about Brazil and China, Zante and Corinth.

They were so anxious to learn, that Dr. Birch could hardly believe they were the same boys who had only cared for tops and marbles. Nor did his wonder cease when, week after week, their lessons were well said, their copies neatly written, their sums done without mistakes; when, in fact, from lazy, idle boys, they became good, industrious scholars.

Ah! how they enjoyed their play-time! Yet play-time was not half so joyful as going home for the holidays, for Dr. Birch had sent a kind letter to their papa, saying how hard they had worked, and that he was quite contented with them.

And so the two boys, who had before been so idle and ignorant, grew up industrious and learned men. They were, besides, able to be kind and good to others; for that is the real use of learning—as we hope our little readers will one day find out for themselves, even if they have not an Aunt Martha, and a Corner Cupboard.

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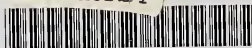
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